

BULLETIN
of
THE EVERETT HISTORICAL SOCIETY

(FOUNDED 1976)

**Local
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R974.44
E93b
v.2
issue 2**

Volume II, Issue 2, November 1978

FEB 23 1979

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THE EVERETT HISTORICAL SOCIETY

ARCHITECTURE IN THE CITY OF EVERETT

by

Thomas L. Higgins, M.D.

Architecture, our most dominant art form, reflects the ideas and tastes of the people who build and live in a certain area. Despite the American tradition of tearing down the old to build anew, a variety of periods are represented even in a city the size of Everett. While most of the earliest structures in Everett have been lost to fires, the forces of nature, and "progress," many eighteenth-and nineteenth century buildings still stand. The primary purpose of this article is to document examples of architectural styles in Everett, with the hope of encouraging preservation of old structures and stimulating excellence in new construction.

EARLY STRUCTURES AND COLONIAL ARCHITECTURE (1620-1725)

The area of land across the Mystic River north of Charlestown was settled in the early seventeenth century. Originally the area was known as Mistick Side, but Massachusetts Bay records show that at a later date, "upon the petition of Mistick Side men, they are granted to be a distinct towne...called Mauldon." 1

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The first dwellings were built with whatever material could be found. Wood was plentiful, and one-room oak-framed houses were the norm. As the land was cleared and as families grew, extra rooms would be added to the original structure. Often the front of the house would face the south with a long, sloping lean-to forming the back of the dwelling. This design provided maximum sunlight through the small front windows, and allowed the strong north winds to slide up and over the back of the house. 2 Initially these homes were held together with interlocking

timbers, and later, wooden pegs, but by the 1700's, wrought iron nails were manufactured in the area and were utilized in construction. Everett has at least two buildings dating from colonial period: the Paige House, at the corner of Shute and Bryant Streets, and the Captain Henry Rich House, at 68 Newton Street. While extensive deed research has yet to be completed on these structures, they are believed to date from the late 1600's, or perhaps earlier. Another Colonial-period structure, the Shute House, dates from 1678 and is now preserved at the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, D.C. The Shute House stood for many years on the street of the same name, and in its later years was used by Claggett Florists as a storehouse. In 1928, the house was dismantled and moved to the Timestone Farm in Marlboro, Massachusetts, where it remained until it was donated to the Smithsonian in 1947. A complete account of the Shute House and its history appears in an earlier issue of the Bulletin of the Everett Historical Society.³

LATE COLONIAL AND GEORGIAN (1725-1780)

During the late Colonial period, the homes became more elaborate. The typical late Colonial house had clapboard siding, twelve-over-twelve pane windows, brick chimneys, and simple framing around doors and windows. The Rich House retains many of these features, indicating it was, perhaps, remodeled during this period.

Georgian structures began to appear around 1720, as wealthy merchants sought to recreate English homeland luxury in the colonies. The prevailing style called for a prominent central entrance, symmetrical dormers and chimneys, and heavy architectural trim. The Georgian buildings were distinguished from

Colonial architecture by the ornate scrollwork around window and door frames, double-hung windows, and elevation of the entire building onto a stone or brick foundation. Late Georgian buildings (1760-1780) featured elaborate round or Palladian windows above the central doorway, heavy cornices above windows and doors, and elaborate entrance pavilions supported by heavy columns. Only "The Hall," an apartment building on Chestnut Street, remains from this period. This building was renovated in 1875 and no longer appears Georgian in design.

FEDERALIST (1780-1820)

Brick was manufactured in parts of Everett (then South Malden) by 1795, and during the start of the Federalist period it began to enjoy widespread use. Following the American Revolution, builders rejected the excessive ornamentation of the late Georgian period, producing instead buildings that were similar to early Georgian or late Colonial structures. Federalist houses have a balanced, symmetrical elevation and plan, end chimneys, a low-profile roof sometimes hidden by a balustrade along the edge and light architectural ornamentation.⁴ Everett's best example of Federalist architecture is the Nathaniel Mead House on Chelsea Street, next to the Armory. Built in 1803 (possibly earlier), it is one of the older houses standing in Everett; beneath the clapboard sheathing is the original brick.⁵ The entrance features an elliptical fanlight over the door, a popular detail of the period.

With the introduction of the Greek Revival style in the early 1800's, houses began to be placed with their long axes perpendicular to the street and the gable ends parallel to the street. The idea was to recreate the effect of a Greek temple, and the more elaborate examples, usually found in public buildings, featured the gable resting on a roof pedestal supported by heavy Doric columns. In the simpler design, as found in homes, the entrance was shifted from the center to one side of the front wall, the windows were tall and narrow, and fan windows graced the gable ends. While some houses sported columns, the temple effect was more often achieved by painting the wooden siding white. A good many Greek Revival-style houses still stand in Everett; elements of the design were incorporated into homes well into this century.

GOTHIC REVIVAL AND ITALIANATE (1835-1885)

With the coming of the railroads and the industrial revolution during the nineteenth century, South Malden began to change from a farming community to a town combining industry, business, and residences. The growth of the population spurred a demand for housing, and it was during this time that many farms were transformed into residential areas, their streets lined with houses. A popular style during this period was Gothic Revival, which sought to capture the effect of medieval buildings with multiple, sharply pointed gables, tall, narrow windows, and lancet-shaped arches. Also popular were Italianate buildings, designed to resemble Italian country villas. These featured a symmetrical arrangement of squared shapes and lines, flat roofs, heavy

cornices with ornamental brackets, and tall, square towers, cupolas, and balconies. As with the Greek Revival style, elements of Gothic Revival and Italianate styles endured and were incorporated into buildings well into the twentieth century.

FRENCH SECOND EMPIRE (1860-1885)

A rather distinctive type of architecture, French Second Empire, reflected architecture in France under Napoleon III.⁶ The distinctive mansard rooflines were often pierced by dormer windows of all shapes and sizes, and the steep, slate-covered roof afforded extra living space on the top floor. An outstanding example of French Second Empire construction is the N. B. Plummer house at 38 High Street, which was later owned by John Schoeder and then by Peter Grassa. Other mansard-roofed homes can be spotted throughout Everett, particularly in the vicinity of Liberty and Devens Streets and Union Avenue.

VICTORIAN (1870-1910)

By 1870, South Malden's population was large enough for its residents to break away from Malden and establish the town of Everett. During the last thirty years of the nineteenth century, Everett grew and prospered as a town in its own right, and, with the coming of streetcars, as one of Boston's original suburbs. The large increase in population created a demand not only for new housing, but also for retail stores and markets, factories, schools, churches, and public facilities. Thus, Everett has a wealth of buildings constructed during the late 1800's and early 1900's, a period often termed the Victorian era. Building firms such as Henderson

Brothers bought up farm lots and built rows of houses which often differed only in minor ornamental details. A prevailing style in Everett is typified by the Cafasso House at 56 Winslow Street. The basic two-story box structure is embellished with gabled side bays and a three-story octagonal tower topped by a spire. Some seven hundred houses were built by Henderson Brothers in a twenty-year period.

Other builders adopted and modified the various styles created for the wealthy businessmen of the Victorian era. While Everett has no Victorian mansions of the type found in Danvers, Topsfield, Brookline, or Newport, Rhode Island, many ten- to twelve-room homes line Pleasant and Hampshire Streets. The Killion residence at 3 Hampshire Street is an example of shingle style. This design, which was more common in resort or suburban settings, features an asymmetrical plan and elevation, and a spreading shingled roof extending over porches and verandas.⁷

The Queen Anne style flourished in the years following the nation's centennial observance in 1876. The irregular outlines and silhouettes of this style result from an informal massing of towers, steep-pitched roofs, ample window space, a variety of surface textures, balconies, and porches.⁸

Carpenter Gothic, sometimes known as "gingerbread," can also be spotted all over the city. This style features sawn-wood ornamentation at the peaks of gables and on porches. The building at the corner of Broadway and Summer Street that formerly

housed the C. A. Curnane Funeral Service, featured much of this elaborate woodwork until its recent remodeling into an office building. During the Victorian era, woodwork was often the main differentiating detail in rows of otherwise similar houses. Porches and interior stairways featured delicately turned spindle-work; the houses often had horizontal decorative bands of wood, and even the clapboards were sometimes arranged in patterns in gables and around window bays.

Around the turn of the century, the three-decker became a popular method of housing cheaply the influx of immigrant laborers. Until recently the three-decker was disparaged as "slum" housing, but today many people are discovering it as "the affordable Victorian." A major advantage to owning a three-decker was the income from the rental units. Usually, the landlord occupied one floor and lived "rent-free," since the utilities and taxes could be paid out of the income produced by renting the other two floors. Dorchester and South Boston are famed for their rows of three-deckers, and Everett too has a fair number, located near the early streetcar lines which ran along Broadway, and along Main, Ferry, Norwood and Elm Streets.

Public buildings in Everett are overwhelmingly Victorian. The most beautiful building of the era is the Parlin library in Everett built in 1894 by Mead, Mason and Company at a cost of \$20,000.⁹ The building, heavily influenced by the Romanesque styles of Henry Hobson Richardson, features a high vaulted roof, a curved ceiling punctuated by skylights, many interesting nooks, bays and crannies, and a tower over the entry. The Home School (now the Vocational School) built in 1893, is an example of High Vic-

torian Gothic. The intermixing of brick and stone gives richness and variety to the building's surface. The emphasis in High Victorian Gothic buildings was on solidity achieved through use of a broad base, with upper stories becoming less massive. Picturesque details in stone and brickwork were employed, as were complex roof lines, which were achieved through the use of towers, and cast-iron crestings. The Home School served as Everett's high school until the 1920's and was equipped with a telescope in a glass cupola when originally built.¹⁰ The Immaculate Conception Church on Broadway is another example of High Victorian Gothic. Built in 1896 at a cost of \$50,000, it was modeled after a medieval Scottish church, and features 123 bay and 37 perpendicular tracery windows. At the time it was built, it was acclaimed as one of the finest churches in the nation.¹¹ While High Victorian Gothic was usually associated with ecclesiastical and public buildings, architects often "borrowed" details in constructing private homes as well. When the style went out in the early 1900's, however, many owners stripped their houses of the original bargeboards, finials, and crestings. Today, only a few examples remain.

STONE CONSTRUCTION

While most of Everett (and greater Boston) rests on land formed by glacial deposits of stone and rock called drumline (which make up the city's many hills), parts of the city are underlaid by granite. In fact, quarries operated in the area around the present-day Florence Street and near County Road on the Everett-Chelsea line. Despite its availability, stone was used primarily in foundations and not for super-

structures, which were normally built of wood. Some of the exceptions deserve mention, particularly the old stone house at 2 Everett Avenue (near Chelsea Stadium). The exact age of this structure is unknown, but it is thought to date back at least to the beginning of the nineteenth century, and may have been used at various times as a prison, a gatehouse for the quarry area, and, most recently, as a private dwelling. Other stone buildings in Everett include the First Baptist Church on Church Street and Our Lady of Grace Church on Nichols Street. The Glendale United Methodist Church on Ferry Street, built in 1925, is a particularly lovely Gothic-inspired structure built of stone.

"NEW" ARCHITECTURE (1910-1978)

Because of its low tax rate, Everett remains a desirable place to live, and new homes have been built throughout the city, often on lots carved out of side and back yards of older homes. Most are wood-frame construction, and styles range from revivals of Colonial and garrison themes to standard suburban ranch houses in the new lots near the Woodlawn Cemetery. Brick apartment houses have cropped up in many places as demand has shifted from large homes for families to one-bedroom apartments for singles and young marrieds. There is no available land in Everett, so construction of new buildings necessitates the razing of existing structures. With luck, the city can avoid becoming over-populated with apartment buildings, and retain its solid one- and two-family homes.

City projects have added to Everett's housing stock over the years. After World

War II, veterans' housing parks were created in part of Glendale Park and east of Ferry Street on land formerly owned by the Massachusetts Transportation Authority. The projects cost \$3,000,000 and provided 268 homes, most of them four-family duplex structures of roughly Colonial revival style.¹² It is to the city's credit that these buildings are well-maintained, in direct contrast to some of Boston's high-rise projects, which have become uninhabitable. The city has also built golden-age projects: one near Florence Street, one at the junction of Lynn Street and Broadway, and one near Glendale Square. This latter, the most recent, is a high-rise structure.

By the late 1950's, the old city hall had proved to be too small for the needs of the city. A new city hall was built on the old site and the park that adjoined it. Designed by Harold Turiello and built by Volpe Construction Company between 1960 and 1962, the building contains the Peter J. McCarren Council Chambers, a city health clinic, and offices for the various municipal departments.

Over the years, as the school-age population increased, Everett found it necessary to build schools and often to remodel them later. Most of the existing brick schools were built in the early part of this century, though the Devens School and the Webster School were built in the 1960's. The Nichols School, which dates from the 1890's, is the city's oldest. The newest is the Everett High School addition, which was completed in the fall of 1978.

Aside from public buildings and a few

newer dwellings, new construction in Everett has been minimal. Unfortunately, much of what has been built neither blends with the surroundings nor adds architectural charm to the city. For example, with the construction of the Star Market in the early 1970's, two blocks of interesting buildings that lined the sidewalk were replaced by a crowded parking lot and an undistinguished box-like structure. The Jack in the Box on the corner of Pleasant Street and Broadway has brought mass-produced, plastic architecture which belongs on a highway, into a residential area. Although local residents succeeded in eliminating a large clown's head from the Jack in the Box sign, glare from the building and traffic still affect the character of the neighborhood. What is needed are changes in the zoning laws which will prohibit parking lots in front of businesses and return the city to the pedestrians.

CONCLUSION

The alert eye will spot many styles of architecture in Everett. Since many of the designs borrow from various styles, it is often hard to place a house in a particular category. It is even more difficult to date a house, since the information is not readily available. A quick check at the Parlin Library of two old atlases of Everett will show if a particular house had been built by 1896 or 1921 (the dates of publication of the atlases). However, since many of the houses were built between those two dates, only a rough estimate of their age is possible.

To accurately determine the date a house was built requires extensive search, including time-consuming research through deeds stored in the Middlesex County Courthouse in Cambridge. The Historical Society

encourages Everett residents to track down the origins of their own homes and to report interesting findings to the Society. Since many structures were added to and remodeled over the years, there are perhaps several dozen old houses in Everett hiding behind modern facades. It is the aim of the Everett Historical Society to document and date every old house in Everett, and all assistance in doing so will be greatly appreciated.

Unfortunately, it is only recently that the historical value of architecture has been appreciated. Boston has been a leader in the restoration movement and can point with pride to the waterfront, the Sears Block, Quincy Market, and numerous other buildings. Seaside cities such as Marblehead and Rockport also can claim a rich heritage of older sites. It is in a city such as Everett that historic preservation is difficult, partly because there is little left to preserve. Everett has lost most of its early structures, including the parsonage of the South Parish on Main Street, the residence of Deacon Calvin Hosmer, Alonzo Evans' home, and the dozens of elegant houses that once bordered tree-lined Charlestown Street (today's Broadway). More recently, the old city hall and the original Centre School have had to be replaced. The problem lies in finding new uses for old buildings. The conversion of the Armory to a recreational center, the rehabilitation of the old C. A. Curnane Funeral Service into a modern professional building, and the re-use of the mansion at the corner of Nichols and Ferry Streets by Microsystems Computer Technology are to be applauded. Too many of Everett's streets are now marred by the presence of ugly mass-designed buildings (such as Star Market, Little Peach, and Jack in the Box), which relate neither to their neighbors nor to

the spirit of Everett.

A planning commission ought to be established to ascertain the historic value of buildings and to prevent destruction of certain historic structures. This same commission ought to insure that new construction is in keeping with the city's character. A similar commission operates in the Beacon Hill area of Boston and has been most successful in maintaining the charm of this tourist attraction.

Re-use of old buildings should be encouraged. While one or two old houses possibly could be set aside as museums, the majority would have to pay for themselves. The Everett Savings Bank has set an excellent example in its re-use of a brick house on Ferry Street as a branch office. The interior has been remodelled to suit the bank's purposes, while the outside has been left undisturbed, save for the addition of an unobtrusive drive-up window.

New construction is needed too, both to sustain the city's vitality and to create an architectural heritage from the 1970's for future generations. But the city deserves better than most of what has been constructed recently. The best-designed new structure is the Centre School, with its brick exterior and three-story height blending into the scale of Broadway. The antithesis of proper scale is the new Sacro Towers, which is far too large compared to the other buildings fronting Everett Square. In the next twenty years, Everett should enjoy a revival, based on its low tax rate and its proximity to Boston, both by car and public transportation. Steps should be taken now to insure that new businesses, homes, and apartments are properly scaled and sited and so designed as to be tasteful additions to the city's

architecture.

As was stated at the outset, architecture is the basic art form which reflects the ideas and virtues of the people. It is time for the people to take a stand and work for bettering the architectural heritage of the City of Everett.

THE EVERETT HISTORICAL SOCIETY

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